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THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN: UNIQUE SOCIALIST EXPERIMENT IN THE ARAB WORLD AT A TIME OF WORLD REVOLUTIONARY FERVOUR

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This essay examines the twenty-three years' existence of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the context of the regional and world Left revolutionary and anticolonial movements of the second half of the twentieth century. The essay first examines the divisions of the liberation movement between followers of Nasserism and those who were influenced by the left wing of the Movement of Arab Nationalists. The 1967 Arab defeat by Israel and the National Liberation Front's occupation of Aden shortly thereafter were important in finalizing the NLF's victory over its Nasserist rival. The essay then addresses the internal causes of the series of factional struggles which tore apart the movement (and later its successor, the Yemeni Socialist Party) throughout the PDRY's existence and assesses the extent to which ideological differences in the world socialist movement influenced these internecine confrontations. The regime's steadfast solidarity with world revolutionary movements took place at the expense of improved relations with its neighbours, who opposed socialism in any form. Despite its poverty, the regime implemented remarkable social and economic policies which gave its population a welfare state beyond its means; the

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essay assesses the extent to which this emerged from autochthonous analysis or from external influences from the socialist world or elsewhere. Finally, it hints at some of the reasons why today's southern separatist movement looks back on this period as a model despite not subscribing to socialism. Throughout, the analysis relates developments and events in the PDRY with relevant events and organizations elsewhere in the Arab world and beyond.

Introduction

Now a barely remembered blip in the history of the Middle East, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) existed from 1967 to 1990,[1] when it united with the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) to form the Republic of Yemen (RoY). While largely forgotten in the outside world, in Yemen itself it has taken on a new life in recent years with the worsening disaffection of the population of that part of the country and the state's inability to propose reasonable solutions to the multiple (and mostly reasonable) demands of the population. While today's southern separatists rarely, if ever, claim any allegiance to socialism, their rallying flag is that of the PDRY.

1 For the first two years after independence, the country was called the People's Republic of South Yemen.

Given its uniqueness as the only "socialist" state in the Arab world, it is worth trying to assess how this situation came about. This essay will examine some details of the rise and nature of the regime and put them in the regional and international context of the time, which go a long way towards explaining its unique situation. It argues the politics of the regime emerged primarily in relation to its close relationship with the far Left of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN), but was also considerably influenced by the overall political movements in the world. These were primarily the liberation movements against colonialism, but also, though less directly, the reciprocal influence of the Left in the North, particularly in relation to the "new left" movements which flourished around 1968.

International context of the 1960s and the struggle for liberation

The 1960s was the decade of decolonization, and the year 1960 was one when many African colonies became independent, mostly by agreement with their colonial powers, in particular France. There were some exceptions. Liberation wars continued in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique. France, having been defeated in Vietnam in 1954, then started a long war against the liberation movement in Algeria, having considered Algeria to be part of France with three *départements* (provinces) and until the end of the 1950s upholding the slogan "L'Algérie, c'est la France". Unable to win,

and suffering heavy losses, negotiations took place and in 1962 Algeria won its independence. The country soon followed a socialist model of development.

Later that same year, the Republicans overthrew the Imamate in what became the YAR. While this has been commonly described as the 26 September Revolution, it was basically a military coup organized and implemented by a few senior officers who had been trained abroad, in Iraq (Peterson 1982, 52, 70–1), as well as by Syrian and Iraqi officers contracted by the Imam, and thus had been exposed to ideas and political systems other than those prevailing in the very isolated Imamate.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Britain was still planning to retain its base in Aden and a close relationship with the newly created Federation of South Arabia. Although a few schools had been established in Aden in earlier decades, education in Aden's hinterland Protectorates was extremely limited, with a few Shaykhly sons brought to Aden to be trained as loyal future local leaders. Exposure to the outside world was therefore fairly limited, though less so than in the Imamate. A few Protectorate students, having completed school, were studying in Beirut, Kuwait and Cairo, where they were exposed to the radical movements which were developing in the Middle East, focused on the Palestinian issue and on anticolonialism (particularly as expressed by Nasser's struggle against the British over the Suez Canal), as well as the Algerian War of Independence. They were influenced by the ideological trends in their universities – mainly the MAN, which developed a number of political tendencies. Many more in the country itself were listening to Nasser's "Voice of the Arabs" on the radio,[2] clamouring for independence from Britain and France and promoting "progressive" nationalist policies. Nasser's Arab Socialism was in the ascendant and very popular throughout the Arab world. So although contact beyond their own localities in no way compared with the twenty-first-century situation of internet, international satellite TV news stations or social media through mobile phones, there was a significant shift from the earlier, almost total isolation, when formal education was the only means to learn about the world beyond the village or town.

2 The importance and influence of the Voice of the Arabs radio in remote locations in South Arabia is discussed in Bujra (1971, 169–71).

It was in this context that the armed struggle for liberation from Britain took place under the leadership of two rival groups, both of which emerged from the specific sociocultural characteristics of Aden and the Protectorates but linked with other movements in the Arab world and beyond. While the immediate aim was to end British colonialism and gain independence, the ideological trends shaping the worldviews of their leadership owed much to their experiences in Aden and beyond. The Yemeni liberation movement had two main approaches, whose characteristics were influenced by their rural and urban bases.

The Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) emerged from the People's Socialist Party (PSP) led by Abdullah al Asnag, which was

the political party of the Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC). It was primarily an urban movement based in Aden, although its members included mostly workers from the rural areas of the Imamate/YAR. Its politics were close to Nasser's Arab Socialism and the British Labour Party, rather than further left, and it remained loyal to Nasser. It was militarily defeated in the summer of 1967 by the National Liberation Front (NLF), which was primarily a rural organization with its roots in the mountains north of Aden but in other parts of the country also, although its leaders had urban connections. Closely connected with the left of the MAN, it had broken with Nasserism and represented a broader range of political views at the time of independence, which had developed through its leadership's experiences as students in Arab capitals. Its leaders were closely connected to those who, at that time, founded the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DPFLP, later DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The 1967 defeat of the Arab forces in the war with Israel had a strong impact on the concepts of Nasserism and led to the decline of Arab Socialism, including Baathism. In the summer of 1967, the NLF in Aden occupied Crater and kept the British army out for two weeks. As Halliday put it:

> Its occupation, however short term, was of immense psychological importance. In the Arab world the rising was greeted with exceptional delight, as it was the first piece of good news after the crushing Israeli victory eleven days beforehand. Inside South Yemen the defeat of Egypt … increased loyalty to the NLF. (1974, 217–8)

This contributed to shifting the loyalties of some FLOSY members and thus helped the victory of the NLF over FLOSY in August. Internationally, the 1967 defeat also resulted in a sharp turn to the left for sections of the MAN, including some of the Palestinian organizations, as well as being an incentive for the left turn of the regime in PDRY in the 1970s. It also contributed to the rebirth of Islamic fundamentalism, but that trend only became visible much later.

In November 1967 Britain hurriedly handed over power to the NLF for three main reasons: first, Britain's strong hostility to Nasser and anything associated with him; second, as a result of the NLF's military victory over its Nasserist rival; and third, due to its ignorance of the political nature and tendencies within the NLF. Although Britain had stated its intention to use Aden as its main naval base from 1960 onwards, in 1966 it announced its plan to leave by 1968, thus indicating it would no longer support its creation, the Federation of South Arabia. This contributed to encouraging the rival liberation movements to push for independence: each wanted to win and both wanted to demonstrate that liberation from Britain was won by force.

In brief, the independence struggle from Britain was clearly influenced by other anticolonial struggles in the 1960s and mostly by Nasser's socialism in Egypt which, largely through its Voice of the Arabs radio, contributed to the politicization of ordinary rural Yemenis who formed the bulk of south Arabia's population. The urban trade-union based PSP and FLOSY, which was the most closely aligned to Nasser's form of socialism, was defeated by the NLF. The NLF itself was primarily influenced by the MAN and its various tendencies, leaving a legacy of division which affected the new regime in southern Yemen.

The PDRY's relations with the outside world

There was a definite synergy between the political tendencies and evolution of the regime's internal politics and its foreign relations, though to a considerable extent the attitude of outside powers was predetermined by ideological and "cold war" international stances rather than by the reality of the regime. Whether foreign relations or internal political differences were the original causing factor is difficult to answer and may well be akin to an "egg and chicken" issue.

The PDRY achieved independence from Britain in 1967 after four years of armed struggle. The regime established by the NLF soon took a sharp turn to the left, partly because of its close relationship with the left-wing sections of the MAN and also through its developing relations with the socialist bloc in the Cold War. It thus instituted the only "scientific socialist" regime in the Arab world. Unlike other regimes which described themselves as "Arab" socialists, such as the Nasserists and Baath, or elsewhere as "African Socialists", the NLF evolved in the following ten years into something akin to what the western media called by the derogatory label "communist".

The propaganda war against the regime never stopped, though it did diminish in intensity and viciousness in the 1980s. It included radio stations supported by its former ruling group, whether traders and other economic actors or the former rulers, most of whom were settled in Saudi Arabia. None missed an opportunity of discrediting the regime and attacking it.

The PDRY survived in an environment marked by political and military hostility at all levels, first from its immediate neighbours: Saudi Arabia gave refuge to many of the exiles who left in 1967 just after independence, as well as others who left later. These included rulers of the statelets from the British period who were totally hostile to the nationalization policies of the regime, including the land reform and other policies which empowered the poor. The Saudi regime went beyond hosting exiles and, well into the 1970s, supported armed incursions across the border, even using its own

forces against the PDRY in 1969. Diplomatic relations between the two states were only established in 1976.

The relationship with Oman was particularly tense in the 1970s, as the Omani sultanate tried to undermine the regime militarily and politically in the far east of the country, objecting to its support for the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf.[3] Ideologically, it is worth noting that the liberation movement in Oman had a parallel political development, starting as a straightforward nationalist movement and transforming into a strong leftist one with ultra-leftist tendencies. Alongside its military weakening, which took place simultaneously with the waning of Chinese support caused by overall world changes in Chinese foreign policy, the Omani movement also itself became more closely aligned with a Soviet approach to nationalist liberation movements. After the defeat of the PFLO (thanks to military intervention from the Shah's Iran and Jordanian troops, as well as British involvement throughout), relations between Oman and the PDRY only gradually improved and mutual diplomatic recognition took place as late as 1982.

3 What started as the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf in 1968 and was later renamed the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf; both PFLOAG and finally the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) fought the British-supported sultanate regime from 1965 till about 1975, when it was militarily defeated. Throughout, it was supported by the NLF and later by the PDRY regime.

The PDRY was involved in two wars with the YAR (1972 and 1979). Both demonstrated the strength of the PDRY's military forces and ended with formal agreements for unification between the two states, leading to the establishment of committees and little else. Relations in the 1980s improved under the leadership of Ali Nasser Mohammed in the PDRY and Ali Abdullah Saleh in the YAR, but unification was eventually brought about in 1990 as a result of internal economic and political crises in both states. Throughout, political rulers had claimed, on the basis of Arab nationalist ideology and historical relations, that Yemen was a single country and that unification was its aim, despite the very different regimes. Unity was a popular slogan everywhere in the country.

Because of its historic and ideological proximity to the Palestinian movements associated with the MAN, the PFLP and the DFPL, the PDRY maintained cool relations with the PLO, which only opened an office in Aden in 1973. The PDRY focused its support on the two descendants of the MAN, which contributed to its reputation as an extremist state, at a time when the PFLP, in particular, was militarily active, as shown in the latter's attack on an Israeli-bound tanker in the Bab al Mandab and the formal blockade on the Red Sea during the 1973 war. In addition, the regime actively supported some of the PFLP's most spectacular and unorthodox actions by allowing it to land a hijacked plane in Aden in February1972. Later in that decade, one indication of its increased moderation was its refusal to allow other hijacked planes to land, as was the case in October 1977. However, the regime's open support for organizations like the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine and giving asylum to some western and other revolutionary hijackers in the early 1970s did little to improve its relations with the main Arab

regimes in the Mashreq or indeed with western states. Although by the mid-1970s the situation changed as a result of the final defeat of the PFLO in Oman and the regime adopted a more critical approach to Palestinian extremists, it retained its position as an outcast in the Arab world.

The nature of the regime and its distance from Arab Socialism can be gauged through its relationship with Iraq's Baathist regime, which was generally bad and sometimes extremely so. The PDRY gave refuge and jobs to Iraqi communists, most of whom worked. In 1980 the Iraqi embassy sent one of its staff to kill an Iraqi university professor in broad daylight, resulting in an armed attack on the embassy by Yemeni forces (Halliday 1990, 170; Lackner 1985, 84), leading to a worsening of already icy relations. This situation prevailed with some defrosting until unification.

Beyond immediate neighbours, the PDRY lived in the overall environment of the height of the Cold War. Although most western states recognized the regime, relations were cool and the PDRY received limited assistance from them or the Bretton Woods financial institutions. The regime broke diplomatic relations with the United States in 1969 and these were only restored a few weeks before unification in 1989; thus, effectively, the PDRY had no relations with the United States throughout its existence. The rise to power of the NLF and the early years of the PDRY coincided with the Vietnam War and the regime provided what diplomatic support it could to the Vietnamese NLF and later maintained close relations with the socialist regime in Hanoi, to some extent seeing it as a model to be followed, as well as with Cuba, which had a constant presence through a hospital in Aden and many medical doctors throughout the country. Its relationship with China was determined both by power shifts within the PDRY away from the pro-Chinese populist Salmine in the early 1970s and the changes in Chinese policies towards third world countries (Brehony 2011, 84), more than by the continuing Sino-Soviet dispute, which the regime tried to side-step by maintaining good relations and obtaining aid from both states.[4]

4 As early as 1968, when the first Yemeni mission visited China, it is interesting to note how the delegation avoided taking sides in the Sino-Soviet dispute despite pressure from their Chinese hosts (Behbehani 1985).

While the role of western European Left movements was not noticeable in the development of the regime's policies, it did come indirectly, mediated through the left of the MAN and the Palestinian organizations. It also existed more marginally through solidarity and support committees in the West, which promoted and publicized the country's achievements. Most noticeably, the PDRY was seen as a potential refuge for ultra-leftists elsewhere who, more than once, tried to land hijacked planes in Aden, something which was not supported or accepted after the 1972 episode. They were sent on their way (Japanese Red Army 1974; German Red Army brigades October 1977). Contrary to the impression one might get from reading some contemporary media stories, Aden did not witness dozens of western leftists wandering its streets and cafés, even though until the mid-1970s a number of revolutionary

exiles lived discreetly in the PDRY under the auspices of the PFLP,[5] which was said to provide some military training.

5 Mermier (2015, 150–60) gives a somewhat extreme view of the role of Aden and the PDRY in support of extremist world revolutionaries during the 1970s. By the time I arrived in Aden in 1977, the situation was far more conventional, with the main foreign presence being that of Soviet and GDR advisors, rather than far left revolutionaries.

Internal politics: factional disputes

It can be argued that the regime's socialist period basically lasted from 1969 to 1986 and effectively ended with the 1986 "events". However, throughout the existence of the PDRY, the politics of the regime were characterized by internal factional fighting, which was largely ideological and related to the different tendencies in the world socialist movements. Given that the regime's main ideological influence came from the MAN, unsurprisingly the first internal split was between followers of the Right and the Left within that movement. Throughout 1968, a number of incidents marked the worsening split between the two groups and the Left won decisively in 1969 with the "22 June Corrective move". The fact that this group was itself divided was manifested by the establishment of a Presidential Council of five members, which in 1971 became the triumvirate which remained in charge until 1978. It consisted of the President, Salem Rubaya Ali, known as Salmine, considered the most populist "Maoist" element; the Secretary General of the NLF Abdul Fattah Ismail, considered the pro-Soviet ideologue; and Ali Nasser Mohammed, the Prime Minister, considered to be a "pragmatist".

The regime's first ten years were the most turbulent, though things were hardly quiet later. The early 1970s were the period when the most radical measures were taken, including the nationalization of most industrial and financial assets (1969), a radical land reform (1970) and the establishment of a new constitution in 1970 which transferred legislative power to a Supreme People's Council, which was to be elected, though the first one was nominated. The 1972 Fifth Congress marked a more formal entry into the socialist world by deciding on its support for "national democratic regimes". The country's siege situation was confirmed by the strengthening of militias, while its socioeconomic programme focused on expansion of the public sector, education, literacy and the emancipation of women (Lackner 1985, 64–7; Halliday 1990, 24–6; Brehony 2011, 56). Opposition to Zionism, colonialism and neo-colonialism marked no change from earlier policies.

Decisions of the Fifth Congress only barely reflect the political in-fighting which was going on during the period, though the formalization of the organization indicated the rising dominance for the Soviet model supported by Abdul Fattah Ismail. From 1973 onwards few dramatic policy decisions were taken, while the struggle between the tendencies continued apace. Salmine had tried to consolidate his position since 1970 by first sponsoring

the peasant and fishermen's uprisings to demonstrate the demands from the people for socialist reforms (Lackner 1985, 67). To counter the formalist "Soviet" tendency, Salmine, following populist "Maoist" pro-Chinese policies, launched the "Seven Glorious Days" mass demonstrations calling for reductions in salaries and the nationalization of housing in July of that year (Lackner 1985, 62). These popular mass uprisings were, to some extent at least, influenced by the Yemeni perception of the nature of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, focusing on people's initiatives and the belief that ordinary people are more likely to have a correct political consciousness, whereas officials and civil servants have bureaucratic tendencies which are fundamentally counter-revolutionary. This very much reflects the left-wing views of the Cultural Revolution widespread throughout the world at the time. Although these struggles within the NFPO reflected the different interpretations of socialism in the Soviet Union and China, they were not directly connected with the Sino-Soviet dispute (1959–70, approximately), which both sides wanted to avoid, as they hoped for political as well as economic support from both China and the USSR.

While, on the one hand, the NLF was bleeding itself dry by its internal fighting, it replenished its ranks by association and later merger with two other left political groups: the local communist party and one of the Baathist groups, whose leaders became important ministers. When these were formally integrated at the seventh congress in October 1975, the NLF became the United Political Organization, the National Front (UPONF), and took many of the trappings of centralized political parties with a Central Committee and a Political Bureau.

UPONF considered itself a step towards the establishment of a socialist party. Politically, it can be said that the organization was becoming more moderate, as it included the "petty bourgeoisie" as a positive force, following Soviet advice to many friendly regimes in the third world. Late 1977 was marked by a tentative agreement on Yemeni unification between Salmine and Ibrahim al Hamdi, the leader of the YAR – agreement which was prevented by the latter's assassination in October of that year on the eve of his travel to Aden, when he was widely expected to sign a unification agreement.

The factional struggle came to a head in June 1978 when Salmine was arrested and killed, accused of having organized (and implemented through a close ally) the assassination of Hamdi's successor in the YAR, Ahmed al Ghashmi. This resulted in a few days of fighting in and around Aden. The October 1978 founding congress of the Yemeni Socialist Party as successor to the NLF, NFPO and UPONF brought about, by the end of that year, a leadership of two: Abdul Fattah Ismail as head of state and Secretary General of the Party, and Ali Nasser Mohammed retaining the position as Prime Minister, which he had held since 1971. While this seemed to be the final ascendancy of the pro-Soviet political tendency, it definitely marked the end of

the populist/Maoist phase, which had been in decline in previous years, not only in the PDRY but also in China, where the Cultural Revolution phase ended and Mao himself died in 1976; his politics largely died with him.

While many hoped this change would finally bring about stability of the regime, with only one major political tendency left, events proved this a futile hope. Within less than two years, Abdul Fattah Ismail had been "resigned" for health reasons and sent into exile to Moscow, leaving Ali Nasser Mohammed holding all three top positions. The following years marked a shift from the more ideological and principled socialist policies, aligned with the USSR, of Abdul Fattah Ismail and his close associates, to a more "pragmatic" line associated with Ali Nasser Mohammed, though the policy changes were insignificant. Ali Nasser's determination to cumulate all three major posts and to exclude anyone who might present a challenge was demonstrated by the killing in early 1981 of Mohammed Saleh Muti', the Foreign Minister and most influential man in the party at the time, as others had gone into exile or foreign posts shortly after Ismail. Muti' was the only senior leader who might have presented a challenge to Ali Nasser as sole leader.

By 1985 Abdul Fattah Ismail's allies were making a comeback, and tensions rose, with the year ending in the expectation of another major open conflict, despite some concessions by Ali Nasser Mohammed. He relinquished the position of Prime Minister to Hayder Abu Bakr al Attas in February and had to accept Abdul Fattah Ismail's return later in the year, as well as his reinstatement to the Politbureau at the October Party congress. The explosion occurred on 13 January 1986 when Mohammed's armed guards fired on the members of the Politbureau attending a meeting while he himself kept well away, heading for his home area stronghold. This led to a few weeks of civil war and the exile of Mohammed and about 60,000 supporters, both military and civilian.

The killing of the remaining major figures from the first generation of revolutionaries, Abdul Fattah Ismail, Saleh Mosleh Qasim, Ali Shaye Hadi and Ali Antar, left the organization with few historic leaders, as some had gone into exile with Mohammed. This particular conflict had a major impact on the regime, and is considered by many to mark its end, even though it staggered on for a further four years. First, it deprived the country of its main historic leaders; second, it was interpreted by the population as nothing more than a power struggle without significant policy differences; third, the killing of over five thousand people in the following days and weeks contributed to the discredit of the regime among the country's citizens. Coming at a time when the Soviet bloc was itself in dramatic decline, the new leaders were unable to get the financial and material support needed for reconstruction of the US$140 million worth of damage caused by the fighting in Aden and the surrounding governorates.

The regime's friends in the Arab world tried to mediate and solve the internal crises which eventually destroyed it. These frequent systematic attempts obviously failed, given events, but are important to mention here as they indicate that the Yemeni leaders were impervious to the influence of their main supporters, indeed mentors, in the Arab world, as well as the commitment of the Arab Left to support the regime. Those who came regularly to mediate over these two decades include most of the leaders who had emerged from the left of the MAN: Mohsen Ibrahim of the Organization of Lebanese Socialists and George Hawi of the Lebanese Communist Party, Nayef Hawatmeh of the PDFP, George Habbash of the PFLP, Fawwaz Trabulsi of the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon and leaders of the PFLO, alongside some individual academics from eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The final struggle within the YSP in the PDRY took place around the process of unification in 1989–90. The new leader, Ali Salem al Beedh, agreed on a full merger of the two states with Ali Abdullah Saleh, a decision which was taken without either consultation or agreement from the YSP's Political Bureau. While all YSP leaders supported unification, most of them wanted the process to be more gradual, starting with a federal system with only foreign and diplomatic affairs unified at an early stage. This particular disagreement on the unification process is one which is very relevant twenty-five years later and is reflected in the southern separatist movement. The outcome of the unification model was a state totally dominated by Saleh, who ruled along the same autocratic and patronage system he had used in the YAR from 1978 onwards.

Main socioeconomic features of the PDRY regime

Regardless of its turbulent politics, it is important to note the main characteristics which ensured significant popular support for the regime, and the fact that many are now nostalgic about it, including a young generation who only know it through hearsay. The PDRY's social and economic policies were those of a welfare state, such as found in Europe (West and East) at that time, particularly with respect to the provision of free health and education services. Its economic policies attempted to follow the East European and Soviet models, with a theoretical focus on state enterprises and cooperatives, though its practice was more pragmatic and less centralized, due to popular resistance.

First, the PDRY inherited an abysmal economic situation. The major sources of income during the British period suddenly stopped in 1967: the British base was evacuated and Aden port became moribund, with an

almost complete stoppage of activities as a result of the closure of the Suez Canal following the 1967 Arab–Israeli war. The minimal aid (£12 million) promised by Britain failed to materialize due to bad relations compounded with lack of clarity of the nature of the deal (Halliday 1990, 66–7). Effectively, the state had no source of income other than fisheries and limited agriculture, as well as whatever aid it could obtain from its very few friends: China was still poor and initially unwilling to provide much support unless the PDRY would fully support it in its ideological struggle against the USSR, something which the regime was unwilling to do.

The Soviet Union considered the PDRY its closest Arab ally and was willing to assist with weapons, but considered that it could not afford to provide development finance to the extent that the PDRY needed and requested. In the period up to 1980 it amounted to US$152 million, only about a third of the total amount received by the PDRY (Halliday 1990, 199).[6] The political and military alliance between the two states remained strong until unification despite the events of 1986, which coincided with changes in Soviet policy as Gorbachev introduced *perestroika* and reduced Soviet commitment to international allies. The USSR then encouraged its third world allies to be less reliant on its support and take independent policies, both for ideological and financial reasons.

6 Halliday provides a list of reasons why the aid was so limited, including general Soviet reluctance to provide aid, the fact that the PDRY was only a "socialist orientated" state and not a socialist state, and that it encouraged the PDRY to diversify its trade to earn more hard currency.

Socialist nationalization policies initiated in the early 1970s during the most dynamically revolutionary phase of the regime discouraged local capitalists, most of whom had left at independence or in the following years as the nationalization policies were implemented. Hence, the establishment of some industries could only be done with external support or by retaining the few capitalist groups willing to continue working under their conditions.

Despite this particularly difficult environment and regardless of the constant struggles within the ruling group, the regime established basic social services of a standard way above what it could afford, with an education system which covered the whole country, up to university level and including most subjects by the mid-1980s, as well as colleges of education in many towns in the governorates; in the early years it was largely dependent on importing foreign teachers, mostly from friendly Palestinian organizations and Sudan. Until the Camp David Agreement (1978), there were numerous Egyptians who were then expelled and replaced by a form of "national service", which sent secondary school graduates to teach in schools throughout the country for two years after graduation. Frequent serious literacy campaigns were mounted to reduce adult illiteracy even in the more remote rural areas. The regime also established a health system which operated throughout the country. Support from Cuba and China played a significant role in the health sector, and by the late 1980s many locally trained doctors were also fielded.

In rural areas the regime provided full employment in agriculture, though some of its policies failed to produce the desired results. The establishment of state farms on the Soviet model on the lands of previous large landholders was largely unsuccessful, while the creation of cooperatives elsewhere, bringing smallholders together, had more success, though in effect the cooperatives remained little more than joint organizations for the acquisition of inputs and services and marketing, rather than a move towards the objective stated in the earlier, more militant days of increased collectivization of ownership and living conditions following the Chinese model.

Between these sectors and limited industry, as well as the growing civil service and military institutions, the population was assured of a basic but adequate living standard for all, something which many promptly regretted as it disappeared with unification with the YAR in 1990.

At the national level, one of the regime's most welcome policies was its willingness and ability to address gender issues. In 1974 it issued the most progressive family law in the Arabian Peninsula, similar to that in Tunisia, making polygamy extremely difficult, giving women the right to initiate divorce, and treating men and women as equally responsible for the maintenance of their households and children. This was a policy which was particularly detested by its enemies and led to accusations of atheism and being anti-Islam. It is also one of the policies which has had the most long-term impact, largely through the expansion of women's education, leading to a situation where, prior to the current war, the majority of senior women in the administration and even the private sector, have either been educated in the PDRY or are originally from the South.

A further important policy was the regime's attempt to reduce allegiance based on ethnicity and family origin, commonly described as tribalism. The regime not only declared a reconciliation and ending of all tribal disputes and feuds, but it actually enforced this quite firmly by sending armed forces to prevent any actions contravening this order. This suppression policy did function effectively, but was unable to prevent underlying anger and memories. Its policy of ensuring that there were representatives of all geographical areas and social groups in both government and party institutions also contributed to the early stages of the establishment of a perception of a nation throughout the country. As we have seen throughout the world in recent times, social cohesion takes many decades to build and no more than a few incidents to destroy – former Yugoslavia is a prime example. However, the events of 1986, while not due to tribal differences, revived loyalty on that basis during the weeks of fighting which followed the initial event, due to the indiscriminate killing of people on the basis of their areas of origin, as the two main factions were from different areas.

So while social policies were largely modelled on those found in Europe, this was perceived by the population in different ways: the provision of

health and education services was widely appreciated, but the women's emancipation and anti-tribal policies had a more mixed reception, enthusiastically welcomed by some and deplored by others. In the long run and given current ideological dominance of Islamist norms, the main objections to these policies are now based on their wrongly asserted incompatibility with Muslim norms of behaviour.

Conclusion

The armed struggle of the 1960s took place at the time of the major anticolonial armed struggles, influenced by those in Algeria and the Portuguese colonies, all of which had, at the time at least, a socialist hue. In addition, the PDRY's birth coincided with the final discrediting of Nasserist-type Arab and African socialism, largely as a result of Nasser's defeat in the 1967 war against Israel. The strong influence of the left of the MAN, and the revolutionary atmosphere of the late 1960s in the West and beyond go a long way towards explaining the regime's far left policies of its early years, also taking place when the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the war in Vietnam gave hope for a different, more equitable world. More locally, Yemeni revolutionaries saw themselves as a vanguard for others as, for example, the Omani revolutionaries also seemed likely to prevail and turn the region left, while they still had hopes for other Arab countries and beyond. The early stages of the rise of Islamist ideology in the 1970s were not sufficiently prominent or visible to dash these hopes.

The regime's policies moderated and became closer to those of other socialist states as time went by and the revolutionary atmosphere waned, the Omani struggle was losing, the United Arab Emirates were established and seemed able to last, and the Egyptian regime and so many others came under the sway of the capitalist side in the Cold War. Chinese influence was reduced, thanks to a change of international policies in China and the shift towards "market socialism", with better relations with capitalist states. By the time of Yemeni unification in 1990, it can almost be said that the regime had become a social democratic one which would have been quite at home in the British Labour or the French Socialist parties of the time, were it not for the strong prejudices and propaganda which still labelled it "communist". Coinciding with the end of the Socialist bloc, Yemeni unification also marked the end of any claims to socialism in the region. Today, the Yemeni Socialist Party's policies are those of a social democratic party, accepting capitalism but offering social protection and services to its citizens.

The current revival of southern separatism, despite the use of the PDRY flag, does not indicate a renewed support for socialism in the country. On

the one hand, the YSP is committed to unity and has therefore lost much support in the South among the significant separatist movement; even if some of its former leaders are now the dinosaurs who claim leadership of the movement, these have either renounced socialism or never really been committed to it.

In the war which has engulfed the country since March 2015, well over half the population of what was the PDRY was born after unification, while many more were children at the time. Memories of life in the PDRY remain active among a minority of people, most of them over 40. Imaginary visions are created and changed on a daily basis, according to the political, social or religious agendas of speakers. As a result, the reality of the PDRY is rapidly moving into the realm of myth and is idealized or demonized. While there is no "real" or objective memory of the state and what it was like, there are certainly some facts which are unarguable and need to be recalled to ensure that Yemenis have access to some of the realities of that regime. These facts, combined with memoirs of life in the country in the overall context of the worldwide ideological trends of that time, should form a valid contribution to a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of that state, the reasons for some of its successes and failures, and the material to assist Yemenis in planning a better future.

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